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39 May Brook Road
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Connecticut General Assembly
Housing Committee
Legislative Office Building
Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

March 9th, 2022

Dear Chairman Quentin Williams, Chairman Rick Lopes, Ranking Member Joe Polletta, Ranking Member Paul Cicarella, and members of the Housing Committee:

I hope that my letter finds you and finds you doing well.

I am Dr. Jeffrey Gordon. I live in Woodstock, CT. I have been the Chairman of Woodstock's Planning and Zoning Commission the past fifteen (15) years.

I am in opposition of HB 5204.

HB 5204 does not create an inclusive, collaborative, meaningful way to tackle the issue of affordable housing in Connecticut.

I am an advocate for addressing the need for affordable housing in our state. Our state is becoming more and more unaffordable by the day. We should work to create greater access to sustainable, responsible workforce and affordable housing for Connecticut residents. We should work toward housing that is attainable by people all across the state, keeping in mind that each town and city is unique. For example, employer-provided housing, duplex and mutli-family apartments, accessible dwelling units, farm housing, and different types of senior housing should be counted as "affordable" in meeting any threshold set by the State for each municipality regarding the number of affordable housing units in each town and city.

As an elected official in Woodstock, I know first hand that good public policies and land use regulations require common sense. HB 5204 may be well intentioned in a general term, but its application would be harmful in specific ways.

The current 8-30g affordable laws are untenable for many communities, especially the rural towns in northeastern CT. The State's definition of affordable housing is strict and very difficult to meet. The changes in the definition proposed in HB 5204 still would be strict. Many towns do not have the pubic infrastructure, public transportation, population base, and/or local jobs to sustain a big increase in the number of new affordable housing units that HB 5204 would require them to create. Furthermore, forcing towns to provide such large numbers of affordable housing to meet a metric created by the State without regard to the unique factors and features of each town would create a situation by which towns would be destined to fail, of no fault of their own. Any resulting penalties placed upon the towns would be an necessary and unfortunate burden on the hard-working families and job creating businesses in each town. It would be like trying to hammer a square peg into a round hole. It does not work. It is wrong. It would be a system that would cause harm to communities across Connecticut.

A one-size-fits all, top-down, state-mandated approach to creating affordable housing in our towns already does not work through the current 8-30g system that has been in place for many years. Why make 8-30g more unworkable?

The way to approach housing is to do what towns have been and are already doing: look at the specifics of each community, work with people in each community, develop a plan to address housing that works

for each community, and upgrade on an ongoing basis a housing plan that meets the needs and future growth of each community.

People who live in their communities know best about their communities and neighborhoods. HB 5204 would exclude them from the fundamental, democratic process of being able to make local decisions that affect their neighbors, families, children, and themselves. Instead, HB 5204 would create a mechanism by which people who do not live in a person's town, and likely do not even know that person's town, would be making important decisions about that person's town. This would be an unfair process. I am opposed to it.

There is more to housing than just what the State defines as "affordable". The work that I have been doing in Woodstock not just focuses on "affordable" housing, but also on "attainable" housing. There are many people who are not low income who nevertheless face challenges regarding buying a new home, building a new home, and staying in a home. It is important not to look alone at metrics such as income category, but also to look at other real-world factors, such as how land is developed and the cost of land use permitting. There are other factors that need to be taken into consideration, such as impacts of housing development on the environment and the available land for development (and the land not suitable for development). Furthermore, there are factors that government and legislation cannot address easily, such as the cost of building materials, the cost of land, and the cost of labor. All of factors do have a play in the overall cost of housing.

As the Chair of Woodstock's Planning & Zoning Commission, I know that before one starts to create or change land use regulations (zoning), one needs first to research, understand, and think through carefully land use goals (planning). I have been doing it for many years. Do not put the cart before the horse. We need to let each municipality continue to look into what would work and not work for its own people, then set out to create updated housing plans and land use regulations. Let us work together to review the State's current 8-30g affordable housing law and to determine collaboratively in an inclusive manner what needs to be done to reform the 8-30g law. These are important steps to take before further legislation is enacted regarding the 8-30g law.

It is not about politics. It is about working together to have smart decisions made. I believe that local planning and zoning officials who are directly elected by the people of their towns are good decision-makers for their communities and neighborhoods. Public meetings provide people opportunities to have their voices heard and for Planning and Zoning Commissioners to learn from people. HB 5204 runs counter to these important principles.

I ask that you vote NO on HB 5204.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Gordon, M.D." The signature is stylized with a large, flowing "J" and "G".

Jeffrey A. Gordon, M.D.